The Autumn Jubilee

An RPG module by Thomas Vose

I'm growing to appreciate
RPG scenarios
that don't involve
busting in somewhere
and murdering everything
that moves.

Plus, you don't often get a
chance to let PCs
compete against one
another.

Let me know if you end up
running it!

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Asking around, one can obtain the following information:

"Jorranson's been bragging about his bait for months now. It will be hilarious if he doesn't win."

"Carreni's wares are still top-notch, and buying them is always a pleasure – it's just a treat to be around her every year!"

"Delator's the man to beat for archery. He took out a bandit last year with a single shot to the eye from 50 yards."

"The drinking contests after dark are amazing this time of year – they only put out the best ale for the Jubilee."

"Poor Deana... She's been training that nasty horse for months now and it went and broke her leg. She's been saying it's a champion, but what good is a horse nobody can ride?"

"Watch that cheating bastard Seamus. He won last year, and people say he greased himself."

"Have you ridden Travers' dinosaur yet? I don't know how he trained it so well."

"Blasted mages won't let anyone look at their wares that can't snap a fire from their fingers."

"I wish Brock would quit complaining about the Jubilee. If his wares aren't as good as others, he should just try harder."

"Colthon Ving... I haven't seen anyone yet who can take him this year. The Pearls will almost certainly go to him again."

A confused and depressed monodrone

A rust monster in a heavy wooden cage

A shackled wyvern that can't fly. At the DM's discretion, the wyvern escapes in the middle of the night of Day 1 and tries to rampage – PCs may be called in to help put it down (or get it away...).

An ankylosaurus named Maarten that is actually quite friendly and lets people ride on its back.

Pickpockets and More

Pickpockets are common, and the PCs should be hit at some point to establish this story arc. They are well-organized by a cambion (MM, 36) named Carreni who owns a brass pentacle necklace that makes her look like an attractive human. Carreni runs a wagon that sells containers, and meets with her group after dark in a small underground dugout that she built years ago for the Jubilee – she parks her wagon over the entrance, and there is a second entrance in the woods her gang uses. She is always looking for new recruits and is more than happy to charm them into working for her...

Getting Started:

The PCs arrive in town the day before the festival begins. Tents and wagons are already set up, and lodging is hard to come by – camping out overnight in a field is an option (that many others have taken—watch your belongings...), or else they can pay an exorbitant amount for a cot in an inn's shared room. Food and drink are in abundance due to the tents pitched everywhere hawking all manner of delicacies.

The town is swollen far beyond its normal size with a mishmash of people of different backgrounds, and the PCs may find themselves a bit overwhelmed by the milling crowds flitting from attraction to attraction, by the colorful decorations, by the smells of various foods (as well as unwashed travelers and hastily dug privy ditches) and the noise of revellers whooping it up with seldom-seen friends.

Carreni has a decent amount of money stashed in her wagon – her take from the pickpockets (and the vast majority of their haul – her charm skills make the pickpockets think this is a great deal). The treasure is mostly in small denominations in cut purses, but adds up – a total of 4500 CP, 2400 SP and 460 GP, with seven art objects (small statues) worth 25 GP each (adjust as desired). There is also a bag of beans (DMG) that Carreni had recently stolen, but which she is afraid to use – she had hoped to get more information about it from the Circle at the Jubilee. She also knows where Mariska keeps her gambling bank, and some of its security measures, but is unwilling to risk it herself. Perhaps some sucker might like to try for her...

Background:

In the small crossroads town called "The Unfolding City," the people gather from the neighboring petty lordships in the area miles around to celebrate an annual fall holiday that has grown into a beloved institution and the secret to the town's success. For two days each year, the sleepy town becomes a major festival hub, and events held in its environs are available to test the skills of the strongest, the fastest, and the bravest. Of course, wherever people gather, a seedy underbelly forms as well...

This adventure is meant as a low-stakes interlude that provides a chance for PCs to interact, test their skill levels and get some downtime.

Carreni will not fight to the death, but will abandon the wagon (and her thieves) if need be. She can make for an excellent recurring villain – cunning and charming, yet malevolent and selfish.

Note: For lower levels, Carreni can be a bandit chieftain rather than a cambion. For higher levels, a succubus or vampire might be more appropriate.

If the PCs put a stop to the pickpocketing ring in a way that can be proven to the town authorities, they will be awarded with a laurel wreath (see above), and free room and board for the rest of their stay. If the PCs return the treasure, the DM should provide an additional experience bonus as well.

Steeplechase (Day 1 only)

Entrants must bring or buy their own horse. Horses are for sale (for inflated prices – double standard rate at least), but only standard mounts are available.

Animal Handling checks help negotiate the obstacles which are, in this order – Fence, low copse of trees (duck), hedge, long stretch (DC 7), ford river, hedge, ditch, homestretch on road (DC 7). Each obstacle requires a DC 12 Animal Handling check on the following table:

1: The horse falls and is injured—you're out.

2-5: Fell off the horse

6-10: The obstacle slowed you down.

10-15: Cleared the obstacle with no change in place.

16+: Cleared the obstacle and gained a place

Note: Deana Ness is a local rancher with a dry wit that has an excellent horse which she calls "Direhorse." It's an exceptional animal, but mean-spirited and will bite and kick (-3 to Animal Handling checks). She wants the horse to win after having put so much work into it, and will happily let someone ride it, if they demonstrate their skill and agree to give her half of the prize money.

While Direhorse is hard to handle, it overtakes others easily – clearing an obstacle on the table above requires only an 8 or higher and will advance you a place with a 13 or higher.

There are four other entrants – assuming the player gets a good start (with an Animal Handling check), they'll start tied. If multiple PCs are involved, opposed Animal Handling checks may become necessary. If there is a tie in the final homestretch, higher roller wins.

Melee (Final event, end of Day 2)

The grand finale of the games is a battle royale with blunted weapons in a roped-off field, with the last one standing the winner. There are 50 combatants, including several of the NPCs mentioned above. The entire team of PCs is encouraged to participate, as this provides an opportunity for them to fight each other safely. Magic is not permitted, and will result in disqualification (if caught). PCs must use the supplied weapons, with no inherent bonuses.

There are 3 tiers of combatants (not counting the PCs themselves) DMs are encouraged to mix and match, saving the champion for last:

They sell scrolls (100% chance of a given level 1 spell, 50% chance of a given Level 2, 25% chance of a given Level 3) and will teach some basic magic (Level 1-3 spells only, same odds of availability as above). The Circle's representative is Sheila Rockmelter, a kindly but no-nonsense middle-aged dwarf woman. Mages are relatively uncommon at the Jubilee – only a few dozen of the hundreds present are practicing mages, and they tend to gather here and (guardedly) talk shop.

Other wagons sell bottles/containers, candles, weapons, talismans, and the like. True magic items are rare however, expensive, and hidden away only for serious buyers to peruse.

Animal Exhibit

There is a large traveling animal exhibit that sets up shop yearly on the riverfront, owned by the Travers family (Edmund, Jaquaria and their daughters Edmina and Sashita). A petting zoo with goats, pigs and common livestock entertain the children, while larger barred wagons contain more exotic (and dangerous) creatures that are obviously drugged to be docile. They include:

Fishing (Both days, early morning)

Nature or Survival check (10 tries in the competition), DC 12 to catch something. Higher rolls indicate size of fish/points obtained (points = roll score - 10). Poles are provided, worms are freely available - get digging. Nature check of 12+ in the surrounding area can find better bait (+2 to fishing check). Survival check of 15+ can tie a fly that provides +3 to check.

Day 1: Top two scoring PCs advance

Day 2: head to head with two other fishers: Cali Lightner, an experienced fisherwoman (+8 to Nature checks) with a limp and Jonas Jorranson, a prematurely grey younger man with a surly attitude and a terrible odor from his homemade bait (+6 to Nature checks)

Drinking

Drinking contests are informal evening events. They serve as a strict CON test against an opponent with a random bonus of 1D6, rolled after the fourth drink taken. If the opponent rolls a 6, he will be a dwarf, in which case he will not have to roll until his eighth drink.

DC for each glass starts at 7 and increases by one after each drink.

Win or lose, participants are at disadvantage on all rolls the first event of the next day...

Wrestling (Both days)

Opposed STR checks, with three successes in a row counted as a win.

Day 1: 3 random opponents with STR bonuses of 1D4+1.

Day 2: Remaining PCs wrestle each other, then winner takes on:

A pale, red-haired human opponent (Seamus McLagan) at +4 (who greased himself, -2 to check)

A surprisingly wiry halfling champion who has mastered joint locks and uses DEX instead at +6.

Local farmers/strongmen: AC 12, 11 HP, sword attack 1D6+1

Guard/Soldier: AC 16, 15 HP, spear 1D6+3

The Champ: Colthon Ving, a skilled gladiator with delusions of grandeur. AC 16, 112 HP (at maximum, DMs are encouraged to have him take a bit of a beating before reaching the PCs) multiattack (3/round), spear +7, 2D8+4 damage, shield bash +7, 2D4+4 damage and knocked prone unless saving on a DC 15 strength check)

And, of course, this is a chance for non-fatal fully comptetive PVP among the party members themselves. There can be only one champion...

Prizes

A laurel wreath enchanted by a local mage with a permanent Luck bonus (+1 to all saving throws, but it makes you look like an ostentatious bastard if you wear it constantly) and a purse of 100 GP for the winner of each event (other than drinking, gambling), with the grand champion of the melee taking home an additional 500 GP and the Unfolding Pearls, a necklace with ten beads that can each be crushed to cast the spell **Leomund's Tiny Hut** ("Remember the comfort and fun of our town when you use it," says the mayor).

Archery (Day 1 only)

Ranged attack check with bog-standard longbows provided for the festival (no weapon bonus). Roll to hit – target has effective AC 10. Higher rolls indicate more points (points: roll score -10) Seven shots per round.

Round 1: need 45 points to advance (Note: DM should feel free to tweak this number so as to ensure at least one PC gets to the finals)

Round 2: Head to head: Abele the Eye, an eerily silent elf with one eye (who is still somehow +8 to hit), and Joseph Delator, half-orc captain of the Guard (+6 to hit)

Gambling

A bookie table is available to place wagers on any event. It's run by a halfling, Mariska Bogsmith (AC 17, 50 HP, +6 to hit with multiattack daggers 1D6+5), who is extremely shrewd and backed up by two identical silent elf archers (one of which can be bribed, but which one)? Mariska's money (1500 GP in various denominations) is locked in a safe in her wagon at nights and magically protected, as it's an obvious theft target. If the money is stolen, the gamblers of the festival will be irate and will turn the thief in to the guards (if they're lucky) unless convinced/bribed otherwise.

Shop Wagons

Food is excellent harvest fare, with a wide variety. Wine and beer are abundant and cheap.

A junk wagon with random trinkets, some magical, run by a laughing and charismatic half-elf, Stuart, with a bushy beard.

Town's apothecary: The apothecary sells herbs, teas, soaps and the like, as well as potions (nonmagical and herbal-based, but with the same effect). She hates magic, however, and will ask people with obvious magic to leave it outside (or not come in). She's also not fond of tieflings, orcs, or other monstrous-looking races, and will eye them suspiciously.

The town's blacksmith, Brock Renfair, is mediocre at best and resentful of the Fair, which brings in wagons with much better material than he can offer. Every year, he says, he gets a little more inclined to set up elsewhere. He can fix materials and do custom orders, but his stock is unremarkable (although his prices are good).

The Circle of Mages from nearby Altaria sent a wagon with a mages' shop to raise funds for their college – but people must demonstrate magical ability to get in by casting a cantrip.